

# What's Happened to the Seat-Belt Regulation?

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The sign reads, “100% Seat Belt Use Mandatory While Onboard This Installation.” It’s located right there behind the signs that read, “ThreatCon Charlie in Effect” and “100% ID Check” as you drive through the base gate.

For months, I’ve been testing how many gate guards know the seat-belt sign exists. I routinely remove my seat belt as I approach the gate and roll down my window. I then wait to see if the guard tells me I’m violating a base regulation. Very few do.

I always introduce myself and ask them in the future to take a second and check to make sure motorists are wearing their seat belts. I remind them it’s their CO’s policy, not mine—and could save a life. The military guards usually respond with a respectful, “Yes, sir.”

Here are a few comments I’ve received from the civilian guards:


- “It’s all I can do to check the decal with these lights and all...”
- “Right, please move along...”
- “Most people just took it off to get their ID out of their pocket...”
- “It was too dark—I didn’t see...”
- “Sir, you’re right, sir, but I didn’t want to say anything, sir...”
- Yeah, ah right—OK, man, I didn’t notice...”

My most memorable experience occurred one evening in late September, while my family and I were entering a naval air station. We were asked to get out of our car while a sharp military-security team went through their paces. I took this opportunity to remind the E-5 in charge I hadn’t been wearing my seat belt and he had missed a great chance to remind folks of the base regulation. His response led to a rather lengthy discussion—much to the dismay of my wife and son, who were left standing in the cold.

He said, “I don’t make people wear their seat belts because I don’t wear mine.” He explained he had been in a mishap a few years earlier and almost hadn’t gotten out of the car before it caught fire because he was wearing his seat belt. How many times have we heard this one?

I listened patiently, then reminded him that perhaps he was able to make the decision to get out of the car because he was wearing his seat belt—and not the steering wheel or part of the windshield. However, it became apparent I couldn’t convince him he was wrong, and with my wife showing signs of hypothermia, I ended the discussion, and we went on our way. I’m sorry I didn’t get his name because I’d have liked to talk to him further.

More Sailors die each year in automobile crashes than from any other cause—natural or unnatural. Fifty-seven of the 94 Sailors (or 61 percent) who died in FY01—our second best year ever—were in traffic mishaps. This past September, four of the five Sailors killed lost their lives in car crashes.

If you’ve ever wondered whether your gate guards know and are enforcing your base seat-belt regulation, I urge you to find out. It only takes a second—about the length of time it takes to die in a crash. 



Navy photo by SN Daniel Johnson